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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2028
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHDX/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 06 MOSCOW 000416

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/13/2019
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SUBJECT: U.S.-RUSSIA CONSULTATIONS ON AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Eric S. Rubin for reasons 1.4 (b)
/d).

11. (C) Summary: Russia expressed strong support for U.S. and NATO efforts to stabilize Afghanistan and offered practical steps to expand Russian assistance during the February 10-11 U.S.-Russia consultations on Afghanistan. The U.S. delegation, headed by SCA DAS Moon and accompanied by the Ambassador, met an unexpectedly diverse Russian delegation from various ministries and the private sector, the composition of which indicated the complexity of the effort necessary to stabilize Afghanistan and the importance the GOR places upon accomplishing this goal. The consultations included discussion of expanded NATO-Russia cooperation, with Russia seeking membership in ISAF supplier and consultation groups; transit, with Russia pushing the U.S. to think expansively about greater cooperation; Russian support for the Afghan National Army, with the U.S. urging appropriate weapons donations; national reconciliation, with Russia criticizing UNSCR 1267 delisting; the Presidential elections; counter-narcotics efforts, with the U.S. proposing concrete measures to enhance coordination; initiatives by the G-8 and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), with the GOR seeking U.S. participation at the March 27 SCO Afghanistan conference; and rebuilding Afghan infrastructure and economic development. While U.S. and Russian officials did not agree on all subjects, particularly the national reconciliation process and Afghanistan's readiness for democracy, the positive attitude displayed by the Russian side holds out the prospect for expanded cooperation that should further Afghanistan's stabilization. End Summary.

Opening Remarks: DFM Ryabkov Makes the Case

12. (C) The February 10-11 U.S.-Russia consultations on Afghanistan opened on a positive note that was maintained throughout the course of the discussions, with Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov and the Ambassador agreeing that this was a propitious time to push the "reset" button in the U.S.-Russia relationship. Both sides noted the significance of the first face-to-face consultation under the Obama Administration being on Afghanistan, an issue that was of great strategic importance to both the U.S. and Russia. Ryabkov recognized that the U.S. had taken the primary burden on itself to resolve the strategic threat posed by Afghanistan's instability, but stressed that Russia was prepared to play a broader role, particularly in supporting counterterrorism efforts. He added that stability and predictability in Central Asia was critical to Russia's security.

13. (C) Expressing appreciation for the Administration's nuanced approach to the challenge, as well as its willingness to work with the GOR, Ryabkov agreed with S/R Holbrooke's assessment that defeating the insurgency in Afghanistan would be more difficult than in Iraq. Ryabkov also agreed on the

need to stabilize Afghanistan through a comprehensive approach that included defeating the insurgency and rebuilding the Afghan economy. He argued that increasing the potential of the Afghan National Army (ANA) was essential if the insurgency was to be defeated. Ryabkov said the ANA would like to have more Russian weapons, and the GOR was ready help with this.

14. (C) Ryabkov argued that the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) would be the best forum to discuss Afghan stabilization, and suggested the establishment of a NRC working group on this issue that would address transit and logistics; counternarcotics in Central Asia and Afghanistan; information exchanges on terrorism threats; and the exchange of information between military veterans and experts on war fighting, and Afghanistan's unique socio-economic composition. While Russia did not seek a military role in Afghanistan, Ryabkov foreshadowed the GOR request to participate in NATO's ISAF supplier and Central Asia consultation groups. He stressed, however, that a range of military and nonmilitary multilateral approaches should build on historical and regional ties.

15. (C) Ryabkov said the GOR wanted to intensify counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan, and argued that cooperation among the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and NATO would be useful in this area. He put in a plug for greater Afghan participation in counter-narcotics training at the GOR's facility at Domodedovo Airport. Ryabkov said that, despite the financial crisis, Russian companies remained interested in constructing housing in Kabul and

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hydro-electric plants in Northern Afghanistan. Ryabkov expressed his hope that cooperation on Afghan stabilization could foster cooperation in other spheres as well.

NRC: Russian Inclusion In Consultation Groups

16. (C) Vladimir Voronkov, Director of the MFA European Cooperation Department, referred to the positive statements by the President and Vice President regarding U.S. relations with Russia, and said that if "we can restore trust" on the Afghan track this could help move the entire bilateral relationship into the "positive realm." The recent meeting of the NRC demonstrated that the disruption of dialogue following the Georgia crisis, which Voronkov blamed on NATO's "excessive response" to Russian actions, had been overcome. He reiterated the GOR's strong support for the NATO mission in Afghanistan, the failure of which would create a security threat along Russia's southern border. Voronkov noted positive developments such as the transit agreement that was about to be put into operation and overcoming problems with the enrollment of Afghan officials at the GOR's Domodedovo facility which had trained 700 Afghans to date. He held out the prospect of further discussion on the two OSCE counter-narcotics projects intended for Afghanistan that Russia had objected to on security grounds.

17. (C) Expanding on DFM Ryabkov's comments, Voronkov proposed that the GOR be included in future meetings of the group of contributors to ISAF, noting that it currently includes non-ISAF members such as Japan, the UN and international financial institutions that play a role in Afghan stabilization. Deputy Director of the MFA European Cooperation Department Yuri Gorlach clarified that this did not mean Russia sought to participate with "boots on the ground" in ISAF, but should take part in these meetings when Russia had the potential to "contribute so much to Afghanistan," referring to our flight, transit, lift, and counterterrorism and counternarcotics efforts. Ivan Soltanovskiy, the GOR's Deputy PermRep to NATO, added that when the issue of Russian participation was raised prior to

the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, it was clear that "some of our partners demonstrated a dubious attitude toward Russian participation." With the resumption of the NRC, the transit agreement, and the prospect of closer cooperation on other elements of Afghan stabilization, a Russian role in future meetings should be welcomed. The GOR also sought participation in the NATO consultation group on Central Asia, arguing that it was an important forum for Afghanistan.

OSCE Activities In Afghanistan

¶18. (C) Voronkov said that, while 14 out of 16 OSCE projects to stabilize Afghanistan were being carried out, security concerns of the GOR and other OSCE member states prevented Projects 15 and 16 from being carried out in northern Afghanistan. He also raised GOR concerns that the OSCE had the capacity to carry out these programs. Voronkov, however, offered that once the Central Asia programs were implemented, Russia would be prepared to discuss Projects 15 and 16 and "in principle" did not rule out the prospect of support.

Transiting Goods To ISAF

¶19. (C) Gorlatch raised GOR concerns whether the U.S. had finalized all necessary agreements with Astana, which might cause shipments to get held up at the Russian-Kazakh border. TRANSCOM representative USN Captain Carl Weiss assured Gorlatch that all necessary steps had been taken and the U.S. was ready to move forward with the first shipment. Representatives of the Russian Railways, were ostensibly on hand to discuss any technical matters that might arise, took the opportunity to present a sales pitch to convince the U.S. to use their services for shipping material to ISAF, even presenting a price list. After circuitous discussions, in which the U.S. delegation side-stepped Russian requests for "proof" of Uzbek and Kazakh transit agreements, both sides agreed that there were no outstanding obstacles to the transit of goods proceeding and reaffirmed a good faith commitment to ensuring that procedural obstacles were overcome.

¶10. (C) Hinting at possible future cooperation, Gorlatch said the GOR has established procedures for transiting military goods to Afghanistan in support of ISAF. Bilateral

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agreements to accomplish this were reached with Germany in 2003 and France in 2004. Both agreements, he said, allow for flights to Afghanistan over Russian territory, with mandatory landings at an airport if the flights are carrying weapons and/or ammunition. Germany can also send military cargo and contingents of third countries, provided that Germany and the third country contingent it is transporting have common logistics within ISAF, and the German government notifies the GOR of transit in advance. Germany also has an agreement to transport military goods via rail to Afghanistan, he said.

Support for the Afghan National Army

¶11. (C) Aleksandr Neronov of the MOD's Directorate of International Cooperation provided an overview of Russian efforts to date to provide military support to Afghanistan. From 2002-2005, the GOR provided military equipment to the ANA and trained 126 Afghan military personnel in Russia. He reiterated the Russian complaint that much of the equipment was not used and even "plundered and sold" by the Afghans. Russia was ready to resume military cooperation, and Medvedev had responded affirmatively to Karzai's recent request for military assistance. The MOD looked forward to a visit by Afghan DefMin Wardak, but was waiting for a proposed date and

agenda from the Afghans, and sought U.S. advice on the type of equipment needed by the Afghans.

¶12. (C) Neronov said that resuming Russian military aid required funding, and asked what the U.S. would be able to provide. DAS Moon responded that the U.S. welcomed Russian military assistance to the Afghans and suggested that the GOR work through the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) in Kabul to determine what Russian equipment would best meet Afghan needs. Neronov commented that when a gift is received, the recipient can do with it as he pleases. Russia would like to ensure that any gifts to the ANA were used, which meant there was a necessity for some payment for weapons. DAS Moon clarified that the U.S. funded the Afghan defense budget, which did not have independent revenue streams. He encouraged the GOR to donate the equipment, which, so long as it was needed and serviceable, would be used by the ANA. DAS Moon reiterated that the U.S. would be pleased to provide the GOR the latest list of ANA equipment needs, and stressed that nearly all equipment used by the ANA had been donated by other countries.

¶13. (C) MFA Second Asia Department Deputy Director Ali Mustafabelli asked if the U.S. objected to the Afghan government working with Russia on a commercial basis, considering that Afghanistan had purchased Soviet-designed weapons from Eastern European countries. Moon explained that some Soviet-designed weapons had been donated by former Warsaw Pact members to the ANA. Some weapons had been purchased for the ANA, but most were donated. The U.S. asked donating countries, or third countries, to pay for shipment of weapons. Furthermore, the ANA was transitioning to NATO-standard weapons, although the Afghan National Police continue using Kalashnikovs. DAS Moon offered to hold subsequent discussions on the issue of Russian military aid.

National Reconciliation And UNSC Resolution 1267

¶14. (C) DAS Moon presented the U.S. argument for continuing the UNSCR 1267 delisting process, reiterating the need to avoid making listing a "death sentence." The 1267 list must be kept up-to-date, with the names of those who have changed their behavior removed. Failure to do so denied an incentive for the Taliban to reconcile with the Afghan government. DAS Moon explained that national reconciliation presented the best means for ensuring long-term stability in Afghanistan.

¶15. (C) MFA Second Asia Department Deputy Director Ali Mustafabelli responded with a frank expression of Russian concern over Afghan national reconciliation, which he called "an illusion" in a country where the central government had limited control of its territory and took direction from a "foreign power." Mustafabelli predicted that if the Taliban were allowed into government or reached some sort of an understanding with Kabul, this would offer only a temporary respite from a struggle for power that would follow the eventual withdrawal of coalition forces. In a long and tendentious presentation, Mustafabelli argued for a "strongman," positing that had the Soviet Union not withdrawn support (as per its agreement with the United States), former Afghan President Najibullah would have survived and prevented the the post-Soviet descent into chaos heralded first by the

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Mujahedeen and then the Taliban.

Presidential Elections In Afghanistan

¶16. (C) Mustafabelli argued that the only way to ensure peace in Afghanistan was to select a nationally renowned leader who had real military resources, even if this had to be done through undemocratic means. Creating a "competent, capable,

self-reliant government" was more important to Afghanistan than holding elections that met democratic standards. DAS Moon responded by explaining the success of the voter registration process for upcoming Presidential elections, which demonstrated the support of the Afghan population for the democratic process. He explained the organizational arrangements for the election and asked that Russia contribute financially. Mustafabelli advised delaying the establishment of real democratic structures in favor of creating a pro-Presidential party that could ensure the election of a sufficiently strong individual who would overcome the nation's internal divisions. A cadre of liberal clergy along with a human rights ombudsman should also be established, he said. The Afghans can fight against foreigners and each other, he argued, but have not yet learned to "fight for democracy."

Countering The Afghan Drug Trade

¶17. (C) Moscow Law Enforcement Counselor Pete Prahar reiterated the U.S. commitment to assisting Russian efforts to counter international drug trafficking, arguing for greater cooperation between the DEA and the Russian Federal Drug Control Service (FSKN) to fight drug trafficking organizations operating along the "Northern Route" from Afghanistan to Russia and Europe. Prahar underscored the U.S. desire to re-energize the U.S.-Russia counter-narcotics relationship, and offered the following steps the GOR could take:

-- Sign on to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime Central Asia Regional Information and Coordination (CARICC) Project and assign a drug liaison officer to work at CARICC headquarters in Almaty, Kazakhstan. This step was critical to improving regional cooperation to fight drug trafficking.

-- Host a Mini-International Drug Enforcement Conference (IDEC) in St. Petersburg from March 31 to April 1, 2009. Prahar urged that a formal announcement of the meeting be made soon, in order to facilitate appropriate attendance by the U.S. and other parties.

-- Send a delegation from the GOR's State Anti-Narcotics Committee, chaired by the FSKN Director, to the U.S. to meet with the White House's Office of National Drug Control Policy and other U.S. anti-narcotics programs, including faith-based and community initiatives, treatment programs, youth anti-drug programs, and drug courts. FSKN chemists should also travel to the U.S. to observe the DEA Signature Program, which is essential to establishing the origins and trafficking routes of opiates around the world.

-- Enhance contacts between U.S. and GOR counter-narcotics officials in Moscow. The GOR should propose a date for a first ever meeting between FSKN Director Ivanov and the Ambassador, and DEA Moscow agents should meet with their FSKN counterparts for a monthly exchange of operational intelligence.

¶18. (C) FSKN representative Olga Popova responded positively, saying that she would forward to the FSKN Director the suggestions that he meet the Ambassador, DEA Moscow and the FSKN meet regularly, FSKN chemists observe the DEA Signature Program. She said the GOR has begun signing the relevant documents to participate in CARICC; what remained was to move forward with the practical aspects of CARICC participation. MFA North America Director Igor Neverov separately affirmed that the political decision to join CARICC had been made; it was simply a matter of finalizing the paperwork. (Note: This has been the GOR message since the June 2008 CTWG.)

¶19. (C) Popova stressed that the GOR wanted to coordinate with the U.S. and other concerned countries anti-narcotics efforts aimed at Afghanistan. She reiterated the GOR's oft-heard "security belt" proposal to fight the flow of narcotics into Russia by placing Russian border guards in

countries located along the Afghan border. (Note: LES seeking details on the "security belt" proposal.) Russia

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would also pursue counter-narcotics efforts through the SCO and CSTO's Operation Canal. Popova pronounced the 2008 poppy crop eradication efforts in Afghanistan a "failure," with only 5,500 hectares of crops eradicated when the goal was 50,000 hectares. She ascribed this to the weakness of the Afghan ministries of Interior and Counter-narcotics.

Cooperation on Afghanistan in the G-8

¶20. (C) Vasili Pospelov, Deputy Director of the MFA Policy Planning Department, expressed Russian support for the Italian sponsored G-8 initiative on Afghanistan and Pakistan. The GOR endorsed the notion of more active participation by Afghanistan's neighbors, including Iran. The GOR was open to the idea of establishing a trust fund to assist stabilization efforts on the Afghan-Pakistan border, but thought that the involvement of the Saudis, UAE and other countries offered both pros and cons, which he did not elaborate. DAS Moon responded that there was consensus among the G-8 that the problems of Afghanistan and Pakistan were inseparable. He said that the U.S. would keep an open mind regarding the Italian initiative, but said that we must be careful to insure that whatever emerges from the G-8 must enhance current efforts, not duplicate or complicate them. The Administration was awaiting S/R Holbrooke's return from the region before deciding further on the issue.

SCO Conference on Afghanistan

¶21. (C) Viktor Seleznev, Deputy Director for the Department of Common Asian Problems, gave an overview of the proposed March 27 Shanghai Cooperation Organization conference on Afghanistan, which would provide an opportunity for countries in the region to discuss methods to counter the threats of drug trafficking, organized crime and terrorism emanating from Afghanistan. He explained that the idea was first put forward by then President Putin in 2007, and agreed to by SCO heads of state in 2008. Invitees would include SCO member states and observers, Afghanistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, G-8 states, and other international actors, including organizational representatives of the EU, NATO, OSCE, UN, CSTO, and OIC.

¶22. (C) Seleznev explained that the SCO was not intending to compete with or duplicate other activities related to stabilizing Afghanistan, but could not disregard the fact that the security situation in Afghanistan directly impacted its member-states. The key element of the conference was to have present all countries that are currently involved in Afghanistan or can have an impact on stabilization.

Infrastructure Rehabilitation

¶23. (C) USAID Mission Director Skip Waskin encouraged Russian involvement in refurbishing dams in Northern Afghanistan, especially those built by the Soviets in the 1960s. He listed six projects that would benefit from Russian technical knowledge and equipment, and asked that the U.S. and Russia work together to identify other areas for Russian involvement. Waskin encouraged Russian firms to bid on USAID funded tenders, including one to upgrade the Salang Tunnel, and suggested a follow-up meeting to allow U.S. and Russian experts to discuss this and other projects in detail. The MFA Afghan desk responded positively to this proposal on the margins of the meeting, and asked that the Embassy facilitate arranging such a meeting as soon as practicable.

¶24. (C) Gennadi Solntsev of the Ministry of Economic Development provided an overview of Russian efforts to increase trade with Afghanistan, which had increased 40 percent over the last two years. He admitted that this was a modest \$188 million in 2008, which accounted for .02 percent of Russia's total international trade. Afghanistan sent agricultural products such as dried fruit and nuts to Russia, while Russia exported timber, wheat, machinery and oil to Afghanistan. Part of the problem in expanding trade was the difficulty in working with Afghan government ministries, which lacked clear jurisdiction on trade matters. Solntsev described the difficulty of establishing bilateral trade agreements because the Afghan side changes its negotiating team and text of the agreement. The GOR, he said, would like to sign such an agreement because it would facilitate economic assistance to Afghanistan.

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¶25. (C) Technopromexport's Director for Asia, Sergey Tatarinov, explained the difficulty his company faced implementing a 2006 contract to upgrade the Nagly hydro-electric plant, a project funded by the World Bank. In addition to maintaining a "small army" to protect the 50 Russian engineers and technicians working on the site, the project was hobbled by Afghan governmental inefficiency, which led to high tax bills and delayed the import of much needed equipment because the ministries of Finance and Energy could not agree on customs procedures.

¶26. (C) Vladimir Katunin of the Russian Chamber of Commerce explained how his organization had formed the Russian-Afghan Business Council under the direction of former PM Primakov to revive a trade relationship that had its roots in the Soviet period. The Council selected areas of the Afghan economy that could attract Russian investment while also benefiting the country's stabilization. He provided the example of an existing Kabul factory that made pre-fabricated concrete blocks that could help address the city's housing shortage, which would provide a needed boost in popular support for the government. With "a little goodwill and funding," perhaps \$100 million, Katunin thought the factory could get up and running again, but this was a difficult proposition for the private sector without greater support from the Afghan government.
BEYRLE